Teaching Implies Learning: A Recommendation to Elder W. Rolfe Kerr, Commissioner of Church Education, by Eric Paul Rogers, 2005

If students have not learned, then we have not taught them effectively. In other words, *teaching implies learning*. Teaching effectiveness must be defined in terms of learning outcomes—in terms of what students know, feel, and are able to do as a result of being in our classes. The achievement of learning outcomes can best be evaluated by carefully crafted assessments that generate reliable data from which valid conclusions about student learning may be drawn. We do not, however, currently assess student learning and growth in CES. Until we begin to foster a culture that values assessment of learning outcomes at all levels of the organization, we will not realize the improvements envisioned by our commissioner and the Church Board of Education.

Purposes of Assessment

The primary purpose of assessment is to identify flaws or gaps in student understanding, attitude, and performance so that students, teachers, and administrators may take calculated steps to fix the flaws and fill the gaps. Additionally, assessment of student learning outcomes will allow us to make valid judgments about the effectiveness of our teachers, teaching methods, curriculum, and other instructional efforts that inform our decisions about teacher training, hiring, and retention, as well as iterative refinements to teaching methods, curricular materials, and training efforts. Finally, assessment of student learning outcomes will allow us to demonstrate to students, parents, priesthood leaders, the commissioner, the Church Board of Education, and to ourselves that we are achieving our objective.

Outcomes to Assess

We seek to achieve a variety of student outcomes. Among the long-term outcomes are Priesthood ordination for young men, the reception of temple ordinances, full-time missionary service, temple marriage, effective marital and parental relationships, and life-long Church activity and service. A causal relationship between seminary and institute participation and these outcomes cannot be established using traditional research methodologies because of the ethical considerations in the creation of experimental and control groups in the research design.

Previous research has demonstrated *correlational* relationships between seminary participation and long-term outcomes. However, other factors such as personal religiosity and family influence are far more predictive of long-term outcomes than participation in seminary and institute programs. Unfortunately, the correlation between participation in seminary and institute and the long-term outcomes noted above has been misinterpreted as causal, leading to expectations for seminary and institute that cannot be directly supported nor validated.

A more productive approach to student outcomes assessment involves narrowing the scope of expectations to outcomes over which seminary and institute can be demonstrated to have a direct and substantial impact. These outcomes may be meaningfully categorized into cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains.

Cognitive Outcomes

These outcomes include the ability to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. For example, we expect students who participate in seminary and institute to be able to *remember* key scriptures (e.g., scripture mastery verses), to

understand scriptural storylines (e.g., the emigration of Lehi's family from Jerusalem to the Promised Land, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the disciples' encounter with the Savior on the road to Emmaus, the events surrounding the dedication of the Kirtland Temple), to *apply* gospel principles (e.g., sincere prayer leads to inspiration from God, following the living prophet will help us to negotiate troubled times, paying an honest tithe will result in increased faith in Jesus Christ), to *analyze* relationships between scriptural passages that lead to a more comprehensive understanding of doctrines and principles, to *evaluate* the various "voices" they encounter in the world in light of revealed truth, and to *create* personalized expressions of faith and testimony relative to the doctrines and principles of the restored gospel.

Affective Outcomes

These outcomes include, among other concepts, attitudes and interests, and beliefs. For example, we expect students who participate in seminary and institute to develop *attitudes* such as openness to the development of spiritual sensitivity, respect for the Lord's anointed servants, appreciation for the preservation of scripture, and self-efficacy in scripture study. We expect students to develop an *interest* in reading the scriptures daily, in their education and personal development, in the origins of their religion, and in personally contributing to the building of the kingdom of God on Earth. We also expect students to develop a *belief* that they are a child of God, that God knows them personally, and that He is interested in their personal growth and happiness.

Behavioral Outcomes

These outcomes include the ability to perform specific tasks. For example, we expect students in seminary and institute to be able to effectively use scripture study aids

(i.e., topical guide, index, gazetteer, maps, footnotes), to explain gospel doctrines and principles (e.g., the role of the Atonement in the Plan of Salvation, the blessings associated with obedience to the Word of Wisdom, the duties and responsibilities of the various priesthood offices), to share personal experiences that illustrate the truthfulness of the doctrines and principles of the gospel, and to bear testimony of divine truth.

These, and many other, cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes can be measured. However, a variety of assessment strategies and methods must be employed to get at the diverse outcomes identified.

Methods of Assessment

The strategies and methods employed to assess student outcomes are dependent upon the nature of the outcome. Low-level cognitive outcomes such as remembering and understanding can be meaningfully captured with traditional true/false and multiple-choice questions. High-level cognitive outcomes such as analyzing, evaluating, or creating may require different types of assessments such as essays, case studies, or student portfolios.

Affective outcomes, on the other hand, require different assessment methods. A multiple-choice test is not likely to provide meaningful information about students' sense of self-efficacy in obtaining divine direction from their study of the scriptures. However, rating scales that address affective traits or interviews may generate meaningful information about student attitudes, interests, and beliefs. Assessments of affective outcomes have been successfully constructed to measure traits such as anxiety, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Why, then, can we not use the same strategies to construct

measures of affective outcomes of importance to those who have a stake in the religious education of LDS youth?

Finally, behavioral outcomes require additional strategies such as performance assessment. Frequently, behavioral outcomes are expressed in terms of real-world settings. Performance assessments seek to simulate real-world situations in which students perform the tasks that require skills developed and practiced in the classroom. Raters and rating tools, such as scoring rubrics, are used to make judgments about performance and to provide specific feedback to the learner that can be used to focus additional study and practice.

The assessment strategies and methods noted above are not exhaustive, but they are representative of the types of approaches that can be employed to assess a variety of student outcomes. Once students have been assessed in meaningful ways, however, it is critical that the results of the assessments are used in appropriate ways that promote improved learning and growth.

Use of Assessment Results

Traditionally, assessment has been associated with grading. Some may argue that nobody likes grading, so nobody likes assessment. But the reason we do not like assessment is that we fail to look beyond grading and see assessment as the key to sustained learning and growth. While grading is a legitimate purpose of assessment, it pales in importance to promoting learning. If assessment results are used only to label a student and not to directly guide future learning, then we forfeit the most significant benefits of assessment. Students, teachers, and administrators must understand that the fundamental and primary purpose of assessment is to identify flaws and gaps in student

knowledge, attitudes, and abilities so that they may be addressed. Fixing the flaws and filling the gaps are essential to meaningful and sustained learning.

If a student does not understand the relationship between the Creation, Fall, and Atonement after completing four years of seminary has the student failed, or has the educational system failed the student? If teaching implies learning, then the teachers have failed. Are we satisfied that teaching the relationship between these fundamental doctrines several times over four years is proof that students understand? Are the responses of a handful of students to the questions asked of an entire class valid evidence that *every* student understands? Are we satisfied as an educational organization if 50% of students understand? What if 75% understand? What is the standard by which we will judge ourselves? What is the standard by which the Church Board of Education will judge us? What is the standard by which the Lord will judge us? Should we not be able to produce evidence that every student has at least a rudimentary understanding of the relationship between the Creation, Fall, and Atonement? If the evidence reveals flaws and gaps, then we go to work to fix them and fill them—then we assess again. We assess to promote learning. We cannot demonstrate that we have promoted learning if we do not assess.

Iterative Process of Outcome Definition, Assessment, and Improved Learning

Defining the outcomes that we want to achieve will not happen all at once. We are likely to define some outcomes better than others in our initial efforts. Another advantage of systematic assessment is the improved definition of outcomes and, in turn, better assessment and improved learning. As we assess we will find that our efforts do not capture a particular facet of a given outcome. For example, in assessing students' ability

to distill principles from a variety of scriptural passages, we may fail to address their understanding of archaic language. In so doing we threaten to draw invalid conclusions about students' ability to distill principles—which they do very effectively in the absence of archaic language. What we learn from the assessment process is that there is an additional outcome that deserves our attention, namely the ability to accurately interpret archaic scriptural language. Over time, systematic assessment helps us clarify our definitions of a wide variety of outcomes and improve methods of assessment that lead to improved learning.

In conclusion, dramatically improved learning and growth will not result from adjustments to teaching strategies and methods that are not informed by evidence of student outcomes. Significant improvements will only occur when we know what students' specific flaws and gaps are and when we make informed decisions about instructional interventions based on those flaws and gaps. Assessment of student outcomes is essential to that process. The widespread acceptance of these principles, however, requires a culture that values and rewards meaningful assessment at all levels of the organization. Such a culture will not emerge until students, teachers, and administrators have positive experiences with principles of assessment that convince them that dramatic improvement can be realized when these principles are applied.

Recommendations

1. Define and continually refine the cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes upon which seminaries and institutes are expected to have a direct impact.
2. Develop and continually refine a variety of organizational assessments that target these outcomes; start small and expand over time.

3. Train teachers in formal and informal classroom assessment practices.
4. Train teachers to use organizational assessments and interpret results.
5. Teach students to self-assess to improve their own learning.
6. Use assessment results to attend to individual student needs.
7. Use assessment results to inform program, area, and system-wide instructional efforts (e.g., teaching strategies, curricular development, teacher training).
8. Use assessment results to track organizational performance over time and to report performance to stakeholders, particularly the Church Board of Education.
9. Apply the assessment principles outlined in the *Administering Appropriately* handbook in both training (teachers and administrators) and teaching (students) environments.
10. Recognize and reward teachers whose students excel in achieving student learning outcomes.
11. Examine the practices of teachers and administrators whose students excel and adopt the effective practices that emerge from their creativity.
12. Share success stories related to student outcomes so that others may experience that success vicariously and be motivated to succeed themselves.
13. Define the desired results of our organization in terms of student outcomes in addition to traditional indicators such as enrollment and completion rates.
14. Set organizational performance goals that are expressed in terms of student outcomes.